

COMMENTS ON: D Ellsberg Draft of 6 ~~XXX~~ Jan 66 on "GVN Concepts of Rural Construction"

Introduction:

plausible --
An extra-ordinarily readable, cogent, and euphoria-inducing synthesis of what GVN officials say they want to, and will, do. There are, of course, a number of statements which will be challenged, and a few minor errors. An effort will be made in Part I of this paper to mention, and suggest either alternatives, corrections, or defenses, for the challenge-probable or erroneous statements.

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Much more serious, of course, ~~is~~ the question whether this Concept is valid -- ~~is~~ susceptible of being successfully implemented -- and, if so, what the requirements for implementation are -- and whether these requirements can be met. These questions will be discussed in Part II.

I. Suggestions on Text:

(These suggestions are keyed to the text by page and line number, and by quoting initial words or phrases.)

1-6 "The rural construction process aims at" Suggest this be continued to read: "achieving a military, social, economic, and above all, political transformation of rural Vietnam, ~~which~~ and making continued existence of local Communist aggression impossible. "

1-13 "These rule without" et seq. Comment: Probably generally true, ~~Refuse~~ Ellsberg but so do the majority of government officials. ~~It says~~ that the great majority do not want Communist rule -- neither do they want government rule; they want to be let alone. The effect of this para as it stands is misleading; more, it is open to attack by those who know the rural situation. Believe it properly should include mention of the lack of adequate government intelligence.

2-4 "To change all this" et seq. Cf. MACV Memo 31 Jan, re Review of Roles etc, and the "three phases concept" of the military, probably contained in AB 140. Ellsberg absence
Nary a word in ~~subject~~ on population and resources control, (with which I concur as theory, but is likely to be seen as a major error by MACV and PSD) nor are

the "three phases" (of AB 140, etc etc etc) defined or stated.

in words

3 - all. The emphasis ^{in words} on winning the cooperation of the people is not new -- it was an integral part of the policy of the strategic hamlet program. Recognition of the complexities and difficulties of achieving commitment seems greater in the new policies than it was before. To state that preceding programs "foundered" on inadequate clearing forces is not correct -- lack of forces, or, rather, ineffective use of available force was indeed a handicap, and the frequent shifting of them (as well as the ~~staggered~~ artificial shortages created by the tying down of large forces to "securing" areas where the people did not want to be "secured") caused the destruction of many (perhaps 50 5%) of the hamlets "constructed" but this was not the main handicap. Most of the hamlets were free from the threat of attack for months; many were never attacked until government forces lost all will to protect them; many successfully resisted repeated VC attacks.

4 - 12 F "...and ARVN plans for 1966..." This sounds like no effort is to be made elsewhere than the three priority areas. (plus An Giang) Do not believe this is GVN thinking, furthermore it would be suicidal -- see lengthy discussions in other papers.

4-13. "...lowly-paid..." Not entirely accurate. GAMO cadre of Khanh ^{Most} and successor governments were well-paid, sometimes motivated. Strat Ham cadre and their successors were ~~usually~~ not functionaries, usually not from the cities (were usually supervised by city people) in some areas were armed, and, indeed, well used and fairly well trained.

4-16 "At the heart" et seq. This is the key statement of this whole section. Excellently expressed, it should be placed more prominently.

II. Is It Valid?

A. Problems:

Any analysis of a proposed pacification program for Vietnam must consider the weaknesses and failures of past programs realistically. The Ellsberg paper suggests that these were a lack of adequate ^{armed} force, an inadequate cadre program, a failure to seek the commitment of the people, and over-rapid expansion. All but the first of these are ~~these~~ indeed elements which have contributed to the failures -- yet heroic (almost) efforts were made to overcome them, and they certainly were recognized at the time. Diem, in an early statement : "The strategic hamlet is a state of mind" certainly recognized the need to win the commitment of the people; recognized too that the physical measures were simply tools to win that commitment and help the people to honor it. Over 7,000 cadre were trained at a central ^{2 weeks?} training center; not less than 10, perhaps ^{5 days?} 20 thousand were "trained" in provincial centers subject to US supervision; several thousands were trained much as are the PAT's and under the supervision (and support) ^{John P. ...} of the same US agency. Only the over-rapid expansion was not initially the source of major concern by all responsible elements in the GVN and the US -- ~~the major~~ only a minority saw its dangers until it was too late.

Why, ~~where~~, then, did the programs of the past "founder" ? They foundered because of three leaks: lack of belief in them, lack of understanding of them, and lack of proper implementation of them; primarily on the part of those responsible for their implementation, from cabinet ministers to province chiefs; from generals to privates; from senior US advisors to hamlet cadre. And the common element in ~~great extent~~ all these leaks, the soft spot that permitted them, was that most officials at all levels and of all services, simply could not believe that what happened to, or was felt by, any particular group of ~~these~~ individual people really mattered. The present program can succeed only to the extent that it plugs these leaks, hardens the common soft spot.

Assuming that these deficiencies are recognized and can be overcome by the proposed training program, insofar as the actual cadre are concerned, is it physically possible to field enough cadre soon enough under the limitations of the program? In other words, can Vung Tau train enough RCC¹ drawn from their home districts to do the job, ~~drawn from their home districts~~ within the time available? (And how much time ^{cited} is available? Thang is ^{in effect} quoted in the 9 Feb Saigon Post as saying: "If it takes ~~four~~ 5 years to pacify a province, that is fine". Is it?)

Realistically, it would appear that Vung Tau can not hope to field more than 400 teams, trained together for 6 weeks, this year. Allowing one team to a village for one year, that works out to 5 or 6 years, since as a practical matter, unless teams are moved out of their home districts, or, worse, only one village in a district is worked at once, there must be after the first year a constant dissolution of existing teams.

Consider also the costs. One cadre, on the average, will cost not less than 3,000 ¹ pastres a month, probably more. Eight hundred teams in the field for a year~~x~~ will cost about 1.4 billion piastres for pay and allowances alone.

² In every province there are pacified areas now, as well as areas undergoing pacification. There are also the "priority areas" and others where the pressure for pacification behind FWF will be overwhelming. We cannot today abandon those ~~villages~~ hamlets and villages which have shown receptivity to support of the government, and have been promised this -- only to come back a year or five years from now and say "This time we mean it." As is generally recognized, ^{too} this has happened ~~xxx~~ often in the past.

Manpower, too, poses a problem, both absolutely and relatively. Absolutely, because in many districts there are scarcely enough suitable men not in the hands (or ranks) of the VC to constitute the cadre, let alone the RF, PF, and local self-defense forces. Relatively, because the competition among GVN organizations is so intense that an RCC drawout of 50,000, needed to keep 800 teams in the

field, may well prove practically impossible.

Leaving these problems aside for a time, one comes to the even more critical and general problem of command and control. Whether there are 50 or 5000 cadre teams in the field, whether these are all RCC Vung Tau graduates, or are largely composed of personnel from other sources (i.e., RF, PF, and PFF) the problem of keeping them working as they are supposed to, and ensuring that their efforts are not negated by the actions of other GVN agencies, military and civilian, remain, ~~and remain seemingly virtually insuperable~~

The present thinking, apparently, is that RCC teams will operate under the control of district chiefs, in turn under the control of their province chiefs. Their activities presumably will be monitored by special staff officers (of the province chief and of Saigon?) and by various American advisors in the provinces.

Even when there was a strong central government fully supporting a program (Strategic Hamlets, under Diem) American monitoring proved unable to prevent the grossest sort of abuses. Now that there is no strong central authority, now that the central government can neither assign nor relieve province chiefs without the concurrence of the Corps Commanders, can we expect more, or less success in implementing a program which, initially at least, will be looked upon as another boondoggle interfering with the effective prosecution of the war and the local man's privilege of doing as he pleases? "Black-bagging" is a temporary, but less than satisfactory, partial solution.

A few more comments. The Ellsberg paper, like most other contemporary thinking, more or less presupposes that the VC, and their "infra-structure" is, in effect, an hydraulic force, exerting a continuing and essentially unvarying pressure at all times -- and hence requiring to be uniformly blocked

off. This is to make the problem seem more difficult than it is. You do not have to kill or arrest every VC supporter in an area to make it safe to support the government. Make a 25% casualty rate probable, and if the attraction of popular support is well carried out you have little to fear from the VC. Arrest or kill two to five VC leaders in the average village, make it unlikely that a platoon or larger can get to the village/hamlet without suffering heavy casualties, and you can establish government presence and win popular support -- if you really try, and if you keep after others who make themselves evident, or are exposed.

Too much emphasis seems to be placed on security achieved by the presence of armed forces. Too little emphasis is placed on the security achieved by good intelligence, and, by making the VC feel insecure. The paper skims lightly as do many, over the problems of arming local self-defense forces. There certainly is no consensus on this in the American community --probably the weight is against it -- yet this is critical to any successful implementation of a program designed to get the people to commit themselves against the VC. Nothing is said about the relationship to exist with the RF, PF, and PFF --- certainly critical to success. And what about the actions and behavior of ARVN, in the past probably the greatest single stumbling-block? And the CIDG and Rangers?

--- --- --- ^{vital}
Is the concept of winning the war through winning the support and commitment of the people valid? I still think so.

Will the proposed program do it? I am sure that it will not. It can contribute, it can be evolved into a successful program, but it will take much effort and many changes, both of thinking and of action, on the part of Vietnamese and Americans alike. Whether the needed changes can be identified and implemented seems questionable.